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SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit the reports of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to the Committee on Information at its consecutive sessions. The present report, covering the activities of JUNIC during 1993, has been prepared in response to that request.

2. JUNIC held its nineteenth session at the headquarters of the International Maritime Organization in London, from 20 to 22 July 1993, under the chairmanship of Mr. Richard Lydiker, Director of Information of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Information directors and officials of 28 United Nations bodies, including specialized agencies and related organizations, attended the session. The report on the session was presented to the Administrative Committee on Coordination. JUNIC considered a variety of matters relating to inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information. Below is a summary of the discussion, and an account of some of the follow-up action on decisions taken at the session on issues that could be of interest to the members of the Committee on Information:

(a) JUNIC discussed several issues pertaining to the Non-Governmental Liaison Service, which has become even more valuable at a time when the United Nations as a whole has been sparing no effort to expand its outreach to non-governmental organizations. At its 1992 session, the Administrative Committee on Coordination endorsed the recommendation of JUNIC that the Service should become a jointly financed activity of the United Nations system, based on voluntary and sustainable financial contributions. As far as the United Nations is concerned, the General Assembly, in section II of its resolution 48/228, allocated $500,000 as provisional financing, from the United Nations regular budget, of the activities of the Service, on the understanding that such financing should not be used for salaries, travel and representation activities

of the staffs of non-governmental organizations. The allocation will be subject to reporting to the Secretary-General on its use and audit by appropriate bodies.

(b) JUNIC held extensive discussions on a system-wide publication on development issues that could replace Development Forum, which ceased publication at the end of 1992 owing to a lack of sufficient funding from the regular budget and/or extrabudgetary sources. JUNIC looked into various options as a means of filling the present vacuum in this regard. Several members of JUNIC reiterated the interest of their organizations in having a new system-wide publication on development issues in the future, when the necessary funds become available. In view of the present financial situation, JUNIC decided to continue discussions on this matter pending specific indications that the necessary funding had been generated.

(c) With regard to participation of the United Nations system in international exhibitions, JUNIC agreed on the need to establish substantive guidelines for such participation, in addition to the already existing guidelines that regulate the relationship between the United Nations system and the sponsors of such events. This matter is to be discussed further at the upcoming twentieth session of JUNIC.

(d) JUNIC also discussed proposals for inter-agency information activities in the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as well as information activities relating to upcoming major events, including the International Year of the Family (1994) and a series of international conferences scheduled for 1994 and 1995, leading to the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

(e) With regard to the International Conference on Population and Development, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) outlined the elements of its information programme for the Conference. While no inter-agency activities were proposed, all members of JUNIC with an interest in population issues were invited to make their own contributions to public information and awareness creation for the Conference.

(f) JUNIC also held extensive discussions on a comprehensive information strategy to publicize the issues before the upcoming World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in March and September 1995, respectively. After its nineteenth session, JUNIC met in two ad hoc sessions, in September 1993 and February 1994, to develop and finalize the information strategies for those two important events. Special efforts were made to link the issues before the two conferences and develop programmes and products that could be used to promote awareness and generate support for the concerns to be addressed in both events. The Department of Public Information of the Secretariat was entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating both information programmes.

(g) JUNIC discussed a number of issues relating to the use of computer technology in the field of information. JUNIC agreed that it would be useful if every information unit in the United Nations system established a means of accessing InterNet, which appeared to be gaining world-wide acceptance. In

addition, it was suggested that it would be extremely desirable if, subject to their internal rules and regulations, all organizations of the United Nations system would use the same software to communicate among themselves. It was proposed that such a system could be tested in connection with Agora, the user-friendly, low-cost, multilingual electronic information and communication system adopted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The representative of IFAD briefed the members of JUNIC on the advantages of that system and invited them to join its group and test the system with a view to establishing a similar system at the level of JUNIC. Also on the issue of the use of computer technology in the field of information, JUNIC agreed that, to the extent possible, photographic databases established in member organizations should be designed to be open and platform independent (i.e., accessible from, and capable of running on, a variety of different computers).

(h) In September 1993, JUNIC held a workshop for Directors of Information of bilateral and multilateral development agencies under the sponsorship of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNFPA. The participants in the workshop discussed a number of issues of mutual concern, including the ways and means of reversing the decreasing interest of the international community in development assistance in the aftermath of the cold war. They also reviewed public attitudes in developed countries towards development assistance, looked into several international audio-visual initiatives and discussed information strategies for several upcoming major United Nations conferences. The group agreed on several proposals for joint action, including the creation of a development information network that would be accessible electronically and include a data bank, and the convening of a colloquium on strategies for communicating global development issues, to be held in 1994. The group also agreed that the Directors of Information of bilateral and multilateral development agencies should meet annually, immediately following or preceding the annual session of JUNIC.

(i) Upon the recommendation made by JUNIC at its nineteenth session, the Administrative Committee on Coordination endorsed the appointment of Ms. Mehr Khan, Director of Information of UNICEF, as Chairperson of JUNIC for 1994-1995.

3. The twentieth session of JUNIC is scheduled to take place from 5 to 7 July 1994 at the headquarters of the International Civil Aviation Organization at Montreal. JUNIC is expected to follow up on a number of activities initiated over the last year and assess progress in the implementation of system-wide information programmes for upcoming major events, including the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.